Press release

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Met Office dispels St. Swithin's day myth

12 July 2001

With St Swithin's day this Sunday (15 July), the Met Office is keen to dispel the myth surrounding the old wives' tale that if it rains on St Swithin's Day, it will rain for the next 40 days.

According to the Met Office, this old wives' tale is nothing other than a myth. This has been 'tested' on 55 occasions*, when it has been wet on St Swithin's Day. However, 40 days of rain did not follow!

While this old wives' tale may not help predict the weather, there is evidence that some other tales do have sound meteorological substance:

'**Red sky at night, shepherd's delight; red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning**' has a valid scientific explanation to support it. The sky appears red due to dust particles or dry air. As English weather systems move mostly from west to east, a red sunrise indicates dry weather moving away to the east, so rain should be expected soon. Conversely, a red sunset hints of dry weather to come from the west.

'**If there is damp fog or mist accompanied by wind, expect rain**' is also sound, as when wind and dampening fog occur, the likely cause is the approach of a front or a moist airstream - the classic forerunners of rain.

'**When the wind is in the east, it is neither good for man or beast. When the rain is from the east, it is for four-and-twenty hours at least**' is also an accurate observation. This is as the coldest and most biting weather does arise in an east wind and observations indicate that the rain does usually last for at least the next 24 hours.

What the Met Office can predict is that much of the British Isles will have a rather cloudy day with brief bright or sunny intervals between showers. Some of the showers could be heavy.

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